

CLAIMS:

What is claimed is:

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1. A method of providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:

determining if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system;

10 allocating a portion of the one or more spare resources if one or more spare resources are available; and

issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing system to perform at least one operation using the allocated portion of the one or more spare resources to thereby provide the subscription computing service.

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2. The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving a command from a human operator to initiate the subscription computing service, wherein the steps of determining, allocating and issuing are performed in response to receiving the command to initiate the subscription computing service.

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3. The method of claim 1, further comprising determining whether to initiate the subscription computing service based on subscriber information, wherein the steps of determining if one or more spare resources are available, allocation a portion of the one or more spare resources, and issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing system are performed if the subscription computing service is to be initiated.

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4. The method of claim 1, wherein determining if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system includes requesting system operation information from the subscriber computing system.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices, and wherein determining if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system includes requesting 5 operating information from the plurality of subscriber computing devices.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more spare resources includes one or more storage devices, and wherein the at least one operation includes writing data to at least one hidden partition of the one or more storage devices.
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7. The method of claim 1, further comprising storing information identifying the allocation of the portion of the one or more spare resources and the at least one operation.
- 15 8. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more spare resources includes at least one of spare data storage and spare computation cycles.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices and wherein the subscription computing 20 service is data backup from a first subscriber computing device of the plurality of subscriber computing devices to a second subscriber computing device of the plurality of subscriber computing devices.
10. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one operation includes reading 25 data from a computing system of another subscriber and writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare resources.
11. The method of claim 10, wherein the at least one operation further includes encrypting the data prior to writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare 30 resources.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one operation includes sending work from a computing system of another subscriber to the one or more spare resources.

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13. The method of claim 1, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a first subscriber computing system and a second subscriber computing system, wherein the first subscriber computing system is operated by a first subscriber and the second computing system is operated by a second subscriber different from the first

10 subscriber, and wherein the subscription computing service includes at least one of backing up data from the first subscriber computing system to one or more spare resources of the second subscriber computing system and sending work from the first subscriber computing system to one or more spare resources of the second subscriber computing system.

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14. A method of providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:

determining if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized; and

20 issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing device to perform at least one subscription computing service operation using the resource if the resource is determined to be underutilized, to thereby provide the subscription computing service.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising receiving a command from a
25 human operator to initiate the subscription computing service, wherein the steps of determining and issuing are performed in response to receiving the command to initiate the subscription computing service.

16. The method of claim 14, further comprising determining whether to initiate
30 the subscription computing service based on subscriber information, wherein the steps

of determining if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized and issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing system are performed if the subscription computing service is to be initiated.

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17. The method of claim 14, wherein determining if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized includes requesting system operation information from the subscriber computing system.

10 18. The method of claim 14, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices, and wherein determining if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized includes requesting operating information from the plurality of subscriber computing devices.

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19. The method of claim 14, wherein the resource is a storage device, and wherein the at least one subscription computing service operation includes writing data to at least one hidden partition of the storage device.

20 20. The method of claim 14, further comprising storing information identifying the resource and the at least one operation.

21. The method of claim 14, wherein the resource includes at least one of spare data storage and spare computation cycles.

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22. The method of claim 14, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices and wherein the subscription computing service is data backup from a source subscriber computing device of the plurality of subscriber computing devices to the subscriber computing device.

23. The method of claim 14, wherein the at least one subscription computing service operation includes reading data from a computing system of another subscriber and writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare resources.

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24. The method of claim 23, wherein the at least one subscription computing service operation further includes encrypting the data prior to writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare resources.

10 25. The method of claim 14, wherein the at least one subscription computing service operation includes sending work from a computing system of another subscriber to the subscriber computing device.

15 26. An apparatus for providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:

a controller; and

a memory coupled to the controller, wherein the controller determines if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system, allocates a portion of the one or more spare resources if one or more spare resources are

20 available, and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing system to perform at least one operation using the allocated portion of the one or more spare resources, based on instructions stored in the memory, to thereby provide the subscription computing service.

25 27. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the controller receives a command from a human operator to initiate the subscription computing service, and wherein the controller determines if one or more spare resources are available, allocates a portion of the one or more spare resources, and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing system in response to receiving the command to initiate the subscription computing service.

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28. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the controller determines whether to initiate the subscription computing service based on subscriber information, wherein the controller determines if one or more spare resources are available, allocates a portion of the one or more spare resources, and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing system, if the subscription computing service is to be initiated.
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29. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the controller determines if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system by requesting system operation information from the subscriber computing system.
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30. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices, and wherein the controller determines if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system by requesting operating information from the plurality of subscriber computing devices.
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31. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the one or more spare resources includes one or more storage devices, and wherein the at least one operation includes writing data to at least one hidden partition of the one or more storage devices.
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32. The apparatus of claim 26, further comprising a storage device coupled to the controller, wherein the storage device stores information identifying the allocation of the portion of the one or more spare resources and the at least one operation.
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33. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the one or more spare resources includes at least one of spare data storage and spare computation cycles.
34. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a plurality of subscriber computing devices and wherein the subscription computing service is data backup from a first subscriber computing device of the plurality of
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subscriber computing devices to a second subscriber computing device of the plurality of subscriber computing devices.

35. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one operation includes reading
5 data from a computing system of another subscriber and writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare resources.

36. The method of claim 35, wherein the at least one operation further includes encrypting the data prior to writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare
10 resources.

37. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the at least one operation includes sending work from a computing system of another subscriber to the one or more spare resources.

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38. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the subscriber computing system includes a first subscriber computing system and a second subscriber computing system, wherein the first subscriber computing system is operated by a first subscriber and the second computing system is operated by a second subscriber different from the first
20 subscriber, and wherein the subscription computing service includes at least one of backing up data from the first subscriber computing system to one or more spare resources of the second subscriber computing system and sending work from the first subscriber computing system to one or more spare resources of the second subscriber computing system.

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39. An apparatus for providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:
a controller; and
a memory coupled to the controller, wherein the controller determines if a
30 resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is

underutilized and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing device to perform at least one subscription computing service operation using the resource if the resource is determined to be underutilized, based on instructions stored in the 5 memory, to thereby provide the subscription computing service.

40. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the controller receives a command from a human operator to initiate the subscription computing service, and wherein the controller determines if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber 10 computing system is underutilized and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing device in response to receiving the command to initiate the subscription computing service.

41. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the controller determines whether to 15 initiate the subscription computing service based on subscriber information, and wherein the controller determines if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized and issues an instruction to the subscriber computing system if the subscription computing service is to be initiated.

20 42. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the controller determines if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized by requesting system operation information from the subscriber computing system.

43. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the subscriber computing system includes 25 a plurality of subscriber computing devices, and wherein the controller determines if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized by requesting operating information from the plurality of subscriber computing devices.

44. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the resource is a storage device, and
wherein the at least one subscription computing service operation includes writing
data to at least one hidden partition of the storage device.

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45. The apparatus of claim 39, further comprising a storage device coupled to the
controller, wherein the storage device stores information identifying the resource and
the at least one operation.

10 46. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the resource includes at least one of spare
data storage and spare computation cycles.

15 47. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the subscriber computing system includes
a plurality of subscriber computing devices and wherein the subscription computing
service is data backup from a source subscriber computing device of the plurality of
subscriber computing devices to the subscriber computing device.

20 48. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the at least one subscription computing
service operation includes reading data from a computing system of another
subscriber and writing the data to the portion of the one or more spare resources.

49. The apparatus of claim 48, wherein the at least one subscription computing
service operation further includes encrypting the data prior to writing the data to the
portion of the one or more spare resources.

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50. The apparatus of claim 39, wherein the at least one subscription computing
service operation includes sending work from a computing system of another
subscriber to the subscriber computing device.

51. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:
- instructions for determining if one or more spare resources are available in the subscriber computing system;
- 5 instructions for allocating a portion of the one or more spare resources if one or more spare resources are available; and
- instructions for issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing system to perform at least one operation using the allocated portion of the one or more spare resources to thereby provide the subscription computing service.
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52. A computer program product in a computer readable medium for providing a subscription computing service to a subscriber computing system, comprising:
- instructions for determining if a resource of a subscriber computing device in the subscriber computing system is underutilized; and
- 15 instructions for issuing an instruction to the subscriber computing device to perform at least one subscription computing service operation using the resource if the resource is determined to be underutilized, to thereby provide the subscription computing service.